

εντροπία

Τεύχος 8 - Ιούλης 2016

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The Cypriot is a Post-Colonial Subject

Antonis Pastellopoulos

The Cypriot as a Hellenic Subject¹

"With the establishment of a public educational system...they [the British] instituted a policy which probably accounts more than any other single factor for the assimilation of notions of Greek versus Turkish nationality among the populace. The British began to encourage the importation of teaching personnel from Greece and Turkey respectively...The texts for the Greek schools required the approval of the Ministry of Education in Greece and material written by Cypriot authors similarly had to be approved by the Greek Ministry... [T]he language of the "orthodox" population differed so markedly from that spoken by Greeks in Greece proper that it was not mutually comprehensible. The result was that the children of the island learned languages alien to them and were socialized into believing, as their parents had not, that they were Greeks and Turks, respectively. Hence, they were enemies."²

"In the early years of the British rule, people who had religious education in Athens, Trieste and Alexandria started to become teachers in Orthodox Christian Cypriot schools. Especially, the teachers who were sent by the Greek Brotherhood of the Cypriots of Egypt had great impact in the development of Hellenic consciousness, since their aim was to introduce Hellenic ideals to their students. The Greek Brotherhood of the Cypriots of Egypt became more organized, as the influence of the Church dwindled and the nationalist tendencies among the Orthodox Christian clergy started to appear. In the last months of 1878, the Greek Vice-Consul in Cyprus reported that the basic elements of national identity began detectable in the island, mostly because of the newly adopted educational policies. As early as 1893, The Greek Brotherhood of the Cypriots of Egypt started to finance particular schools in the island that teach the curricula of Greece."³

Thus in the midst of intersecting cultural and military imperialisms, the Orthodox Christian Cypriot was taught his ethnic identity and declared his Enosis. At the point of this declaration, he positioned himself on the colonial question of the 20th century; the moment of declaration became the pivotal event in the self-positioning of the Cypriot in relation to the world

produced by capitalist modernity. He declared his little palace in the kingdoms of Europe, his place in the West. "I, I am no African, no Arab, no Asian. I am no savage – I'm a Westerner, I am a Greek", he screamed out, demanding to be heard. The Orthodox Cypriot claimed no self-identity, he struggled not through the claim of independence, of self-rule, of elevating the locality to the level of universal humanity, he did not construct or re-construct identities against the ideologies of colonialism, but rather, he claimed his place in the sun of the imperialist cultures through an identity given to him from overseas. Declaring himself a Greek; the Orthodox Cypriot elevated himself to civilization, he located himself not only within Europe, but on its very foundations. The Orthodox Cypriot is not merely European – he rests on the very foundations of Western civilization, he embodies Greekness, the Hellenic culture that produced philosophy, sculpture, epic poetry, theatre, athleticism, the Greek is here relocated into the core of Europe, the pillar of civilization, and Cyprus is transferred from the coasts of Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Lebanon onto the European plains⁴.

The other pillar of course being Christianity, the Orthodox Cypriot "naturally" claimed both. Greek and Christian, the Orthodox Cypriot appropriated the colonial hierarchy of colonized cultures and races, but only by negating himself from it – the demand thus to reunite with the motherland, to be allowed to shine again on this earth, to become part of the Greek state, was the return to civilization, to Europe and the West. To say this island is Greek is to state that it is Western, to state as a Cypriot that "I am Greek" is to relocate myself in the West, to distinguish myself from the Orient, from the colonies, from the East, from the cultures deemed inferior by colonial rule. The Orthodox Cypriot did not thus struggle against, or abolished white racist culture, but rather attempted to claim it for his own.

The Orthodox Cypriot thus elevated himself to civilization by entrenching the Cypriot subject within imperialist ideology, by positioning it above colonized people and within the civilized races of the world. In the process of this transformation the native cultural element was subjugated to the Hellenic – from the

island's dialect to Cyprus' place in historical discourses, from pre-history to tradition, Cyprus was seen as a natural extension of Greece, as a particularity of Greek culture, certainly to be mentioned, discussed, and displayed, but only within the narrow confinements of Hellenic-centred discourses. Any attempt at elevating the native culture beyond these limits was seen in and for itself as an attempt to depreciate the Hellenic. Native culture was only a particularity, Cyprus was to be connected to the greatness of Greek literature, art, philosophy and history, an emphasis on the local may potentially form cracks in this imagined historical and national continuity, this potentiality formulates competing and contradictory genealogies and narratives. Such narratives challenge Cyprus' precise position in it, they smell of despicable Cypriotism, they devalue the Cypriot to something less than Greek, and thus to something less than civilized.

The Cypriots are Hellenic, and considered white; they are located in the West. The native culture was subjugated to the Hellenic; it was left outside of the structure of the state, of the schooling system, of the ideological mechanisms of Cypriot society. Its controlled representation, contra the representation of Greek culture, guaranteed the formation of a cultural hierarchy, with high Greek culture on the top and the native and folk culture as inferior in relation to it. The "proper" language became the Greek of the Athenian suburban living rooms; Greek mainland national art replaced the native folk in claimed emphasis and significance. The native culture was of course displayed, but within particular confinements and precise specific spaces and times. On one side, it was projected as a culture existing in a past historical space - in nationalistic parades, school performances and documentaries it was relocated to the sphere of tradition, into the pre-modern and the backward, it became strictly a historical memory being preserved in the fashion of the museum, always seen through national lenses; but now assumed extinct or dying. On the other side, it was projected through the production of televised entertainment. Presenting itself as culturally backward, as part of *Horkotisini* (Χωρκατοσύνη)⁵ or often located within a pre-modern historical narrative, the representation of the native's culture was here again both historical and/or pre-modern, implicitly uncivilized. The semiology projected in relation to the native culture devalued its significance and proclaimed the cultural hierarchy: Native culture is backward, uncivilized, it belongs to the past and not the now. Hellenic culture in contrast, is progressive; it is modern and Western.

It is not surprising that this antithesis exists. The

hegemonic Greek identity constructed in Cyprus, and the culture that it carried with it did not have as a point of origin Greek folk culture, for the Hellenic in the island is first and foremost the construction of the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie. It is the ethnic nationalism of the elites, borrowed from the Greek upper classes and imposed on the Cypriot population through an intensifying Greek cultural imperialism, by an intense nationalistic public education system and a state monopoly of the television and the radio until the 1990s, creating a structured and socially reproducible inferiority complex. The Cypriot who attempts to imitate the Greek, in reality attempts to internalize the Greek and Cypriot bourgeois culture, while being at a class position which disallows the reproduction of their bourgeois lifestyle. The one who attempts to negate, transcend and revolt against this internalization is assigned negative status within the cultural hierarchy put in place on the island. As Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o points out, colonialism needs to control "through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world"⁶. This process is accompanied with the "the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser". Greek cultural imperialism followed this process obediently, aided by a Cypriot bourgeoisie that held and holds an enormous power over the state and the broader ideological apparatuses, since 1963.

Hellenism expropriates Cyprus for the West, it relocates the island within the imagined confines of European civilization; it attempts to transcend colonialism by a transformation of the colonized subject into an integral part of the civilized peoples of the West. It appropriates imperialist and colonial ideology, placing the Cypriot at the progressive side of history within the grand imperialist hierarchy of races and cultures. The Cypriot attempts to imitate the Greek bourgeoisie, in the process internalizing the inferiority of his folk and cultural heritage, judged upon a scale of classed cultural hierarchies produced by bourgeois thought.

The Cypriot identity, through the lenses of the Hellenic, is not a meta-ethnic identity. The Cypriot hegemonic structure allows no such inclusivity – one remains an Other, so far as one lacks the purity of the imagined Greek lineage, no matter how far one has appropriated the Hellenic culture imposed onto the Cypriot identity. The "Cypriot as Greek" formalizes the conceptualization of an imagined lineage of Greekness, a racial barrier to inclusivity; race here identified with the individual's imagined ancestry in relation to national

and ethnic purity, rather than phenotypical characteristics. The Other, within the confines of our imagined Hellenic island, is the non-Greek, irrespectively of any legal inclusion of the individual within the Greek community of the Republic of Cyprus. This condition is not merely imposed on individuals of non-native descent. The Latino, Maronite and Armenian communities of the island, absorbed into the Greek community in post-independence, were reduced legally to the level of the religious group, marginalized by a state hegemony that denied their history and culture as an integral part of the native/local historical narrative and social experience.

The position of the Turkish Cypriot remains ambiguous in a Cyprus absorbed by Hellenism. The Turk is perceived of course as a non-European; he belongs strictly to the Orient. Recognized as a Cypriot constitutionally, positioned as part of a legal community of equal importance to the Greek politically, projected as anti-Greek and anti-European ideologically; in the logic of cultural stratification the Turkish Cypriot is to be recognized as a Cypriot only in terms of minority status. The Cypriot is Greek, the Turkish Cypriot is, if accepted, of secondary importance, he is to be seen only as a citizen of the state, but not an organic part of history, his cultural projection is a threat and a challenge to the Hellenic mythology, his elevated existence challenges the proclamation of Cyprus as Greek, European and Western. The Turkish Cypriot remains an Other, a foreign entity that had entered the island in a precise historical moment, polluting its Hellenic heritage. The Romani community however fairs a sharply different treatment - it is simply not recognized, either legally or socially, as a group with any historical link or cultural contribution to Cyprus. It is hidden.

That the Cypriot has appropriated racist imperialist thinking is strikingly evident by the self-identification of those who do not quite fit into the purity of the Greek ideal lineage. The too often stated

self-identification of many as “half-Cypriot” hides within it the racist logic of the mixing of the races projected upon the Cypriot identity. In contrast to other identities, such as Britishness, which has reached the point of meta-ethnicity (but has however maintained its usefulness for cultural homogenization and internal cultural imperialism), where one states his “original” ethnic ancestry while maintaining the British identity, the Cypriot identity remains highly racist and does not in fact denote an affiliation with a geographical space. Proclaiming that I am half-Cypriot is to accept that the identity of the Cypriot is not inclusive to me, that it does not incorporate my existence, it itself splits me into parts, fragments me and partly negates me, in places me in some kind of limbo. The phrase “half-Cypriot”, uttered by even the most integrated and assimilated individuals, who have no cultural connection to their other ethnic “half”, is a point upon which the hegemonic Othering process entrenched in Cypriot social relations becomes blatantly obvious. The half-Cypriot is to be placed in the hierarchy of the Cypriot society according to the background of the foreign parent, filtered through by the parent’s gender, phenotype and ethnic identity, by a racial hierarchy kindly inherited by our colonized past. Slav, African, Arab, Asian or European, the half-Cypriot will never become a proper Cypriot, simply by accident of birth. If Erving Goffman stated in relation to social stigma that “we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human”⁷, let us note here that in Cyprus the person who is not conceptualized as a descendant of pure Greek lineage is somehow, not quite Cypriot.

The Cypriot, Cypriotism and Recycled Identities

Cypriotism, the ideology which came to contest the hegemonic ideology viewing the Cypriot subject as Greek, appears at first glance as a vague category tortured by its internal contradictions. Cypriotism can be argued to incorporate the position of the Communist Party of Cyprus in the 1930s, the post-74 position of AKEL, the Turkish Cypriot left, the anarchist and Trotskyist circles of the 80s, 90s and 00s in Limassol and Lefkosia, the pre and post-2003 bi-communal rapprochement movement, the Occupy Buffer Zone movement and the neo-liberal faction of DISY. Such an over-stretched category of course becomes ridiculous and Cypriotism, if it is to be comprehended at all, should initially be situated historically.

Emerging as a challenge to Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalism after 1974, Cypriotism



attempted to replace the starting point of political analysis and social identity from the national element to the local⁸. Cypriotism does not claim the abolition of national or ethnic identity; its existence is in fact both assumed; and necessary for Cypriotist discourse. It is not thus another form of ethnic nationalism attempting to displace existing nationalisms with an imagined Cypriot ethnicity or nation. Cypriotism re-claims the identity of the Cypriot; it attempts to negate any ethnic/racial/national identity from it, its project is one that first and foremost attempts to transform, through discourse, lobbying and political initiative; the Cypriot identity from an ethnic into a meta-ethnic identity. As a movement, or at least a coherent and structured ideological position, it emerges with the formation of the neo-Cypriot Association in 1975, a pressure group formed in reaction to the events of 1974, attempting to bring about the comprehension of the Cypriot as a meta-ethnic identity. The AKEL party became the prominent messenger of the Cypriotist position in the official Cypriot politics the post-74 period⁹.

Class-oriented perspectives, such as the one expressed by the Communist Party of Cyprus, cannot be strictly considered Cypriotist. The Communist Party did not express some form of meta-ethnic comprehension of identity particular to Cyprus. Informed by Marxism-Leninism, it called for the Turkish and Greek proletariat of the island to unite on a basis of class, to position themselves through class-conscious politics and actions against imperialism and capitalism, in an attempt to gain benefits for the working class and the peasantry; and ideally to overthrow the mode of production responsible for the proletariat's exploitation. Class here transcends ethnic identity indeed, but not in favour of some meta-ethnic identity that restricts the inclusivity of ethnicities to two, three or any number of ethnicities, in the fashion of Cypriotism¹⁰. It is an internationalist position, not a Cypriotist one; reflecting Marx's and Engels' call in the Communist Manifesto for the workers of the world to unite. Similar ideas are heard from time to time by the Cypriot extra-parliamentary left and various anarchist circles. These perspectives are rooted in the socialist traditions of the First International; to confuse them with Cypriotism is to misunderstand working-class internationalism. The Cypriot left has however overwhelmingly placed itself on the Cypriotist position in the decades following 1974.

Cypriotist discourse can be strictly divided into two categories. The first is bi-communal Cypriotism, which remains the dominant discourse; and a minority position of a multi-communal, or even multi-cultural Cypriotism encompassing broad heterogeneity,

expressed by individuals such as Andreas Panayiotou¹¹. Bi-communal Cypriotism, in its process of reclaiming the Cypriot identity as meta-ethnic, has situated within the Cypriot identity the two constitutionally recognized communities of the island. These are the politics of rapprochement, of the bi-communal movement and the pro-solution factions in the debates over the Cyprus dispute. The Turkish and the Greek Cypriot communities are both situated under the meta-ethnic identity of the Cypriot; the religious groups are assumed as integrated into and submerged by the Greek Cypriot community. Bi-communal Cypriotism informs both the neoliberal position of DISY on the Cyprus dispute, as well as the rapprochement politics of AKEL and the majority of the extra-parliamentary left. Bi-communal Cypriotism is the ideology deemed appropriate to support the bi-communal state, be it unitary, federal or confederal; it is therefore the ideology most suitable for the Cypriot state after a non-partition solution to the Cyprus dispute.

Although challenging the present status quo, bi-communal Cypriotism does not radically break with the given identities put in place in the colonial era and given constitutionally by the imperialist powers in 1960. While it negates a single and fixed ethnicity from the Cypriot identity, thus positioning itself directly against ethnic nationalism, it in fact reproduces the ethnic identities themselves through the bi-communal meta-ethnic identity. Bi-communal Cypriotism situates Cyprus within the European West, but from lenses quite different – culturally, economically and politically, Cyprus is still comprehended as Western, not the least because of the accession of the state within the European Union, a process that crystalized and sealed Cyprus' position in the imagined geographical entity called Europe. The Cypriot no longer needs to be imagined as strictly Greek to be Western and European, that is, civilized rather than Oriental, the Cypriot can now retain his position in the West irrespectively of the Cypriot identity being ethnic or meta-ethnic.

Bi-communal Cypriotist ideology does have the theoretical capacity to develop into a civic nationalism, happily encompassing within the meta-ethnic Cypriot identity the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities. As the most likely candidate for the ideology of a reunified Cypriot state, bi-communal Cypriotism will in its turn formulate new layers of exclusivity and inclusivity, positioning the existing constitutional and ethnic identities already existing on the island, as the hegemonic cultures, attempting to bridge their cultural differentiation through the focus on commonalities and the identification and production of a bi-communal unitary culture, a process that has already started taking

place. Unsurprisingly, bi-communal Cypriotism neither does, nor is it able to challenge the appropriation of Cyprus into Europe, so entrenched in the psyche of its inhabitants by Hellenic nationalism. Strictly speaking, bi-communal Cypriotism serves no radical alternative; it is confined within the hegemony of the Westernized subject. At the point of hegemony, it will reconstitute its Oriental, uncivilized, shadowy and socially hidden Others in the presence of the religious group member, the Romani citizen, the migrant worker, the half-Cypriot, the Turkish settler, the non-native citizen and the foreign refugee.



1. This essay was inspired by the reading of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks*. I will not be referencing Fanon, but his influence should be assumed throughout the text. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* has also been proven most useful and inspiring, especially his examination of the relations between culture, language and colonialism. I've repeatedly used the pronoun "He" throughout the text as a reminder of the gendered nature of ethnic identities. A gender or intersectional approach in relation to the Cypriot identity is currently out of my personal abilities, and requires a careful examination of primary and secondary material that concern a neglected topic of analysis. Rather than presenting the text as gender-blind, I decided to use the pronoun "He" to emphasize the very nature of the gendered ethnic identities which I believe do exist; and socially reproduce themselves on the island. The emphasis on the Greek Cypriot as the Cypriot subject does not attempt to position him as some form of assumed universal subject of analysis. The essay focuses on the particularity of the Greek Cypriot precisely because any analysis of the subjectivity of the Turkish Cypriot subject, the Armenian Cypriot subject, the Maronite Cypriot subject (and so on), is again beyond my abilities at this point. Words such as "race" and "civilization" are used to clarify points concerning racist and imperialist lines of thought.

2. Pollis, Adamantia (1973) *Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial*

Policy: The Case of Cyprus, Comparative Politics, (5) 4, pp. 589-590

3. Kardioğlu, Pinar (2010) *The Rise of Ethno-Nationalism in Cyprus Under the British Rule: 1878-1960*. Thesis (PhD), Middle East Technical University, pp. 89-90

4. One needs only to ironically consider here how Lefkosia/Lefkoşa has been described repeatedly as the last divided capital of Europe, when the city is obviously located geographically in the Middle East.

5. This is a Greek Cypriot derogatory term. It corresponds in many ways to the English derogatory use of the word peasant. Caesar Mavratsas has examined the term and its usage in some length in his work *The Society of Peasants* (Η Κοινωνία των Χώρκων).

However, Mavratsas seems to have missed the importance of the term in regulating individual behavior in Cyprus, specifically in attaching negative status to the native Cypriot culture in relation to Western modernist conceptions of the cultured individual. The term can be argued to attach a stigma on its carrier, connected with his or her non-assimilation to some form of Westernized norm. Its power is derived not so much in the negativity of acting like a Horkatos or Horkati, but in the conscious and systematic attempt of the individual at avoiding being called one. In this sense it bears some characteristics with the use of the term British for the purpose of culture

assimilation, but in a negative, inverted fashion.

6. Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa (2005) *Decolonizing the Mind*. New York: James Currey, p. 16.

7. Goffman, Erving (1986) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 5

8. Mavratsas, Caesar (1997) The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974-1995: politics, social memory and identity, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, (20) 4, p. 721.

9. Papadakis, Yiannis (2005) *Echoes From the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide*. New York: I.B.Tauris, p. 161.

10. That the Communist Party had expressed so called Cypro-centric positions is not denied. However, such perspectives continued to rest upon the long term goal of a proletarian revolution that would assimilate Cyprus with the socialist commonwealth of the Soviet Union. Shifts between positions of enosis and independence for the achievement of a People's Republic, are different positions on Marxist-Leninist revolutionary strategy; and rest neither on ethnic nationalist or Cypriotist lines.

11. Panayiotou Andreas (1992) *The Cypriot Identity is Born by the Historical Experiences of the Land* (Η Κυπριακή Ταυτότητα είναι γέννημα των ιστορικών εμπειριών του τόπου), In: *Cypriot Consciousness: a Dialogue about an "experience without a name"* (Κυπριακή Συνείδηση: διάλογος για μια «εμπειρία χωρίς όνομα»). Independent Cypro-centric Publications, Brochure.